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By Dave Eisenstadter

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PETERBOROUGH — New Hampshire has a rightful place at the forefront of the alternative technology market, Congressman Charles F. Bass, R-N.H., told Peterborough Rotarians Monday afternoon.

Bass' visit kicked off a week-long trip around the state to talk about jobs in alternative energy technology.

New Hampshire, Bass said, has always been among the states that have led the way in such technology, from agriculture to milling to machine shops. In the 1980s and 1990s, New Hampshire had the second-largest high-tech work force per capita, he said.

Now, industry is on the cusp of a new technology — alternative energy sources.

New England Wood Pellet in Jaffrey — Bass owns stock in the company — is a prime example.

"This is an industry that didn't exist 20 years ago," Bass said, "and now this company employs well over 100 people."

Later in the day, Bass met with representatives from Keene State College, Monadnock Economic Development Corp., Antioch University New England, the Mountain Corp., the City of Keene, Southwest Regional Planning Commission, Keene Housing Authority, N.H. Housing Authority and Southwestern Community Services to discuss ways New Hampshire businesses can take advantage of opportunities for jobs in alternative technology. The meeting took place at the senior housing facility at 49 Community Way in Railroad Square.

"We as a state don't have oil, gas or coal here, but we do have biomass, wind and solar and we have the history with technology to move to the head of the line in this process," Bass told the Peterborough Rotarians.

A one-time Rotarian and founding member of the Peterborough group, Bass said his visit was aimed at fielding questions and evoking opinions.

Responding to a question about potential tax increases in response to the debt crisis, Bass said he thought taxes should be on the table along with everything else, but that cutting spending was the priority because that is where the major increases have occurred.

"Every time we try to do something about spending, it doesn't work," Bass said. "I wanted to see if I could exhibit the courage to reduce spending and bear the consequences."

Another person asked about spending in Afghanistan and whether that would change soon. Bass said he hopes President Barack Obama will use al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden's

death to change the course of the war in Afghanistan, and reduce the number of troops in that country.

Ted Renna of Hancock asked about changes to Medicare.

"No one wants to lose benefits or pay higher taxes, and Congress isn't going to look at anybody who wants to do these things," Renna said. "Medicare is going to go bankrupt."

Bass said the one thing Congress could not do was leave Medicare alone. He said the two solutions were to raise the Medicare tax or to change the structure of the program.

"The average working American pays roughly \$100,000 and the system pays out roughly \$300,000 per person. That's the bottom line."